Adeption

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Summary: Set WAY after 'The Lost Age'; Prox and Vale have an alliance, and there's an Adept Training class being held.

Chapter 1: Adeption

_ Adeption _

Intro...

Vale, like the elders always say, was a small town. 'Was' being the key word there. Right now, the population defies the very concept, but it has the look and feel of one. The buildings have had thatched roofs for centuries. There's a chicken running wildly in every street. Our main shops are just converted houses, and everyone knows just about everyone else. Which makes the next part even more mysterious.

About five hundred years ago, the books just go blank. There's no record of any time before that. Nothing that says who founded the village, how it came to be, nothing. And still no record of there ever being a 'small' size. The book dating the farthest back describes the meeting between Vale and our sister village to the north, Prox. Apparently; we've been trading with them for as long as we've existed. Odd indeed, considering that Vale and Prox are over five hundred miles apart. Yet, the truth might lie in the fact that Vale and Prox have one striking similarity.

Citizens of both Vale and Prox are born with a connection to one of the four elements, either Wind, Earth, Fire or Water. Making use of this power, called 'Psynergy', is one of Vale's closest guarded secrets. A person from a city unknown to Vale or Prox is not to be shown any bit of this. Showing Psynergy to an outsider is, and always has been punishable by complete and utter banishment. I don't know about Prox, but I wouldn't worry about them. They're somewhere near

the edge of the world, and we're pretty much the only visitors they get.

Anyway… life here in Vale is pretty much nondescript, even with all the mystery. There's really only three things not allowed- Using Psynergy to hurt people, showing Psynergy to outsiders, and using Psynergy for yourself- but only two of those are really enforced. Other than the widely spaced breaking of those rules over the years, the trips to Prox, and the occasional chicken stampede, nothing really happens. Oh wait… there's one more thing that's of moderate interest….

1) Adept Training

"One… two… three!" I channeled the essence of the earth into my body. Enhanced somewhat by the fresh spring air, the wondrous energy coursed through every muscle of my body, lending its power to me. It still felt new, exciting, and wonderful. Even after all this time. I smiled, glanced at my fellow classmates, and focused my energy into a small seed on the ground. Within minutes, it grew three feet into a miniature sapling. I vaguely noted it was a cherry tree before I saw someone not… especially… *likeable* coming my way.

"Good," the master commented, "but keep it under control. This is the force of nature, not some plaything for your own amusement."

He raised his voice, signifying he was speaking to the entire class. "Psynergy is the power of the human mind to control the elements- Jupiter; for the noble winds, Mercury; for the tranquil waters, Mars; for the mighty flame, and…" He looked at me. "Venus, for the great earth. You little miscreants have been here for almost a year now; improving your control, strength, and all-around ability at harnessing

your powers. So why have only a select few of you improved?"

Master Jin took a deep breath, exhaled, and calmly walked among all of the trainees. He looked at each one of us, including myself, with his old, calculating eyes.

"Remember the commandments set down by our great ancestors," he commanded, "What are they?"

We all knew the commandments by heart; they'd been ground into us from birth. So I could guess why half the class rolled their eyes.

Most of the class shouted in unison. "ONE!"

Master Jin recited, in a loud voice. "Psynergy is never; and I repeat- NEVER to be used for malice, evil, or wrongdoing of any kind. It is a blessing, a beautiful gift. A gift of the gods for our use, and we must respect that. Which, of course, leads to the second commandment."

I shouted, along with the rest of the class. "TWO!" Any bystander could tell we had done this many times before.

"Psynergy must be used at all times for the benefit of others. Never for one's own good. That would be directly disrespecting the god's blessing upon us."

One more to go, I thought to myself. "THREE!"

"The unseen will remain unknown. Psynergy is strictly forbidden in the presence of outsiders of any kind. These commandments were set years ago to protect both the citizens of this town and the secrets we hold. There are people in this world that would destroy us if they learned of our gifts. These are the same who, if they had been blessed

as we have, would destroy the world." He sighed. "Now are there any questions? NO? Then you're all dis-"

"I have one, *Master,*" sneered Devlin. I looked to my left. Devlin was sort of a… foreign exchange student, if you will. A Mars adept from Prox, he had the patience of a goldfish and the temper of a two-year-old.

"We all know you're hiding something, Jin. When are you gonna let loose with the advanced stuff?"

I glared at Devlin. "What needs to be done, Dev, is you never speaking for the group again. Your opinions have rarely coincided with the rest of us." Not surprisingly, he glared back.

He was just about to reply, when our master interjected. "I apologize for holding back your progress, Devlin, but some of the other students simply have not attained your level of experience yet. So you shall just have to WAIT until EVERYONE is READY. Understand?"

Devlin looked appalled. "B-but… I mean… COME ON!"

"I am truly sorry, young adept. Maybe in another month or two."

The old man turned back to the rest of the class; many of which were waiting impatiently, some sweating under the hot April sun. "Class dismissed, everyone. You may return to your homes."

As everyone else walked away, I grinned. Score one for the home team.

2) Ritualistic

One hour later...

I look to my left. I see a large oak, reaching up to the heavens, symbolizing that potential is nearby.

I look to my right. I see a path, leading to conformity, the opposite of nature. Obviously not a good choice to take.

I look above. An endless expanse of blue stands there, symbolizing the future.

I look within. My soul is alive, sensitive to the earth and its bountiful splendor.

I look ahead. I see a clearing. Surrounded by trees much like the oak, this is my destination.

I give a small token of respect to the earth by planting a seed in an empty spot. The seed needs no psynergy. My honor and pride will give it great height, in time.

Damn ritual, I thought to myself. We knew from the beginning that Jin makes his students find a training area suited to their element every year, but why does it have to be so freaking complicated? Sure, he says it clears the mind, but I'm perfectly cleared from thinking of nothing but the perfect self-adapted ritual. I sighed. Nothing I can do about it.

I walked over to the large rock in the center of the clearing. This couldn't be more perfect. I had found a natural place to hone my skills, without using a single bit of power to alter anything.

Then again, nothing lasts forever. An additional quirk of being a Venus Adept was control over all things rock, as well as plants.

I sat down on the rock, with my palms gently resting on its surface. Inhale, one, two, three, exhale. Just like always. Feel the power of the earth within my body. Concentrate. I visualized cracks in the rock. One, two… THREE. I sent a pulse of energy through the rock. Several cracks appeared, as intended. I stood up, power still flowing rampant in my veins. Yet again, a wondrous power at my disposal. Walking several feet away from the large stone, I concentrated on the cracks. I reached my hand toward them; grasping, but not touching. Two large pieces of rock, formed, shaped and outlined by the cracks I had made eroded into fine, white sand- sand that blew away in the gentle breeze. I released my hold on the rock, and glanced at my craftsmanship. Cancel my earlier statement, this just got better.

I'd produced the perfect steps.

3) Sprung

Inhale… one, two, three, and exhale. Inhale… one, two, and… three… and…

I hate meditation. It's so… meditative. It's just so boring. If I got more immediate use of it… then I wouldn't hate it so much.

Exhale.

I opened my eyes.

And stared into someone else's.

"Ah!" she screamed. She reared back, blond hair glinting in the sunlight. Without thinking, I reached out, still in meditation position. She stumbled, and hit the ground. I gave one strong burst of Psynergy in her direction--and to my surprise; it worked! A large plant had burst forth from

the ground, softening her fall, but not as much as I had hoped--Her body hit the ground with audible force.

I leapt from the rock, landing by her side. "Before I ask why you were hovering next to my face, are…"

I gasped. Her eyes were rolled back in her head; she was out cold. Not moving an inch.